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What is Claimed:

1 1. A method for disseminating information associated with an active
2 conference participant to conference participants in a conference system, the conference
3 system including connections between a conference bridge and two or more participant
4 locations, each participant location having one or more conference participants, at least
5 one of the conference participants having a connection to a data network, the method
6 comprising the steps of:

7 associating the conference participants with participant information;

8 identifying an active conference participant supplying data to the conference
9 bridge for broadcast to the other conference participants; and

10 transmitting at least a portion of the participant information associated with
11 the active conference participant over the data network to at least one of the conference
12 participants having a connection to the data network substantially concurrent with the
13 broadcast of the supplied data.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the associating step comprises the
2 steps of:

3 passing a conference bridge identifier to a new participant location, the
4 conference bridge identifier corresponding to one or more participants at the new
5 participant location;

6 receiving the conference bridge identifier and participant information
7 corresponding to the one or more participants from the new participant location over the
8 data network; and

9 associating the one or more participants from the new participant location
10 with the participant information responsive to the received conference bridge identifier and
11 participant information from the new participant location.

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1 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the associating step comprises the
2 step of:

3 receiving the participant information and the conference bridge identifier via
4 a website accessible over the data network by the conference participants.

1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the associating step comprises the
2 steps of:

3 identifying at least one biometric characteristic of a new conference
4 participant;

5 receiving participant information associated with the new conference
6 participant from the new conference participant;

7 initially associating the new conference participant with the participant
8 information based at least in part on the biometric characteristic of the conference
9 participant and the participant information received from the conference participant and,
10 thereafter, associating the conference participant with the participant information
11 responsive to the biometric characteristic of the conference participant.

1 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the associating step comprises the
2 steps of:

3 receiving the participant information from the conference participants via the
4 conference bridge; and

5 associating the conference participants with the participant information
6 received via the conference bridge.

1 6. The method of claim 5, wherein the conference participants are
2 connected to ports of the bridge and wherein the step of associating the conference
3 participants with the participant information received via the conference bridge comprises
4 the step of:

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5 associating the conference participants with the participant information
6 based on the port to which each conference participant is connected.

1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein each conference participant accesses
2 the conference bridge using a unique port and wherein the identifying step comprises the
3 step of:

4 identifying the active participant based on the receipt of data at the port of
5 the conference bridge accessed by the active conference participant.

1 8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2 receiving at least one biometric characteristic from each conference
3 participant when establishing connections to the conference bridge;

4 wherein the identifying step comprises identifying the active conference
5 participant based at least in part on the biometric characteristic.

1 9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of:

2 storing the at least one biometric characteristic during an initial conference
3 for use in the identifying step during subsequent conferences.

1 10. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2 receiving a respective aural biometric characteristic from each conference
3 participant when establishing connections to the conference bridge; and

4 wherein the identifying step comprises identifying the active participant
5 based at least in part on the respective aural biometric characteristic.

1 11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

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2 receiving a respective visual biometric characteristic from each conference
3 participant when establishing connections to the conference bridge; and

4 wherein the identifying step comprises identifying the active participant
5 based at least in part on the respective visual biometric characteristic.

1 12. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

2 storing the data supplied by the identified active conference participant
3 along with at least a portion of the participant information of the identified active
4 conference participant.

1 13. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

2 developing a profile for each of one or more conference participants; and

3 selecting the portion of the participant information to pass to each of the one
4 or more conference participants responsive to their developed profiles.

1 14. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifying step comprises the
2 step of:

3 identifying the active conference participant supplying data to the
4 conference bridge for broadcast to the other conference participants at a particular time; and

5 wherein the transmitting step comprises the step of:

6 transmitting the participant information substantially concurrent with the
7 broadcast of the data supplied at the particular time by the conference bridge.

1 15. The method of claim 1, wherein the transmitting step comprises the
2 step of:

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3 transmitting the at least a portion of the participant information in
4 accordance with a Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) instant messaging (IM) system.

1 16. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

2 receiving communications from a first conference participant via the data
3 network; and

4 selectively distributing the communications to one or more other conference
5 participants.

1 17. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

2 receiving one or more commands via the data network, the one or more
3 commands associated with one or more conference specific details; and

4 selectively distributing information related to the one or more conference
5 specific details to one or more conference participants responsive to the one or more
6 commands.

1 18. A conferencing method in which participant information associated
2 with active conference participants in a conference call is disseminated to conference
3 participants, the method comprising the steps of:

4 establishing connections between a conference bridge and two or more
5 participant locations, each participant location having one or more conference participants,
6 at least one conference participant having a connection to a data network;

7 associating the conference participants with participant information including
8 personal information and location information;

9 identifying an active conference participant supplying data to the conference
10 bridge for broadcast to other conference participants at a particular time; and

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11 transmitting at least a portion of the personal information associated with
12 the active conference participant, using the location information associated with the
13 conference participants, over the data network to one or more of the conference
14 participants substantially concurrent with the broadcast of the data supplied at the
15 particular time by the conference bridge.

1 19. The method of claim 18, wherein the associating step comprises the
2 steps of:

3 identifying a respective biometric characteristic of a new conference
4 participant;

5 receiving the participant information from the new conference participant;

6 initially associating the new conference participant with the participant
7 information based at least in part on the respective biometric characteristic of the
8 conference participant and the participant information received from the participant and,
9 thereafter, associating the conference participant with the participant information
10 responsive to the respective biometric characteristic of the conference participant.

1 20. The method of claim 18, further comprising:

2 receiving the respective biometric characteristic from each conference
3 participant when establishing connections to the conference bridge;

4 wherein the identifying step comprises identifying the active participant
5 based at least in part on the respective biometric characteristic.

1 21. The method of claim 20, further comprising the step of:

2 storing the respective biometric characteristic during an initial conference for
3 use in the identifying step during subsequent conferences.

1 22. The method of claim 18, further comprising the step of:

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2 developing a profile for each of one or more conference participants; and

3 selecting the portion of the participant information to pass to each of the one
4 or more conference participants based at least in part on their developed profiles.

1 23. A conference apparatus for disseminating information associated with
2 an active conference participant to conference participants in a conference system, at least
3 one conference participant having a data connection to a data network, the apparatus
4 comprising:

5 a conference bridge configured to broadcast data from an active conference
6 participant to other conference participants;

7 an instant message system configured for communication with the at least
8 one conference participant having a data connection over the data network; and

9 a conference enhancement system configured for use with the instant
10 message system and the conference bridge, the conference enhancement system
11 configured to associate one or more of the conference participants with participant
12 information; identify an active participant supplying data to the conference bridge for
13 broadcast to the other conference participants; and transmit at least a portion of the
14 participant information associated with the active conference participant over the data
15 network to one or more of the conference participants substantially concurrent with the
16 broadcast of the data.

1 24. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the conference enhancement
2 system is configured to identify the active conference participant based on biometric
3 characteristics associated with the active conference participant.

1 25. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the conference enhancement
2 system is configured to identify the active conference participant based on a port identifier
3 associated with a port of the conference bridge through which the active conference
4 participant supplies data to the conference bridge.

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1 26. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the conference enhancement
2 system is configured to maintain a user profile for one or more conference participants for
3 use when transmitting the at least a portion of the participant information to conference
4 participants.

1 27. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the conference enhancement
2 system is configured to maintain a database of data broadcast from the conference bridge
3 and participant information associated with the active conference participant.

1 28. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the conference enhancement
2 system is configured to maintain a database of instant message broadcast information for
3 prior conference participants and associated biometric information for use in subsequent
4 conferences.

1 29. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the instant message (IM) system
2 is a session initiation protocol (SIP) IM system.